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CEREBUS

mothers & daughters

31

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APR

NOTE • FROM • THE PRESIDENT

To find a printer for your self-published comic book, you can refer to the yellow pages of your phone directory. Provide them with a copy of a black-and-white comic with colour covers (*Cerebus, Yummy Fur*, whatever) and ask how much they would charge to print 2,000, 2,500, 3,000, etc. This is the way that printers work; if you just ask how much they charge, they're going to ask how many you want to print. Expect the quotes to vary from around 40 cents to 2 dollars a copy. Let them know that the cover stock and interior paper do not have to be exactly the same and that you are concerned about keeping the cost per unit down. Sometimes they will have a supply of paper from another job or remainders lying around that they can give you a 'deal' on.

The difference in price will depend on what the printer specializes in. If they do mostly wedding invitations and fliers, a comic book is going to be a very big job and it's going to cost you. If they do mostly newspapers and advertising supplements, it will be just another job. If they do mostly coffee-table-style art books and labels and promotions for Coca Cola, Exxon or other multinational corporations, your job is going to be too small and it will cost you.

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Meanwhile, back at the creative end of things, I am finding that the biggest problem potential self-publishers face is not knowing for a fact how productive or unproductive they are. Without naming names (although I am sorely tempted), lack of productivity has become a recurring theme. The self-deception falls into a number of distinct categories. 'I'm plotting issue six.' When they say this, what they mean is that they only have six pages done on issue two and issue one came out eight months ago. 'I'm finishing up issue five.' When they say this, what they mean is that they've done all the 'easy' pages, half of the book is a mass of pencil squiggles and to get the book out on time, they will have to pencil, ink and letter between two and three pages a day and the printer will have to shoot the pages, print the book, pack it and ship it in a day and a half. 'I should be back on schedule with issue four.' When they say this, what they mean is that issue one of their bimonthly title came out in August of 1991, issue two came out in December 1992, issue three came out in June of 1993 and issue four will be going to the printer in the second week of September (to the average self-publisher, the day the book goes to the printer is the day it shipped; they fail to take into account that it takes an average of three weeks to print a book and three weeks for it to arrive in comic book stores). If you are doing a bimonthly book and issue four ships sixty days after issue three, you are late. This is one of the fundamental differences of perception in the direct market. I remember Ger and I working like plantation slaves to get *Cerebus* back on schedule; it was one of those periods when we were shipping a book just about every two and a half weeks (the memory lingers of that arduous time; it is an article of faith, the Central Article of Faith at A-V, now: Never Again). I would go into Now & Then Books and someone would smirk at me and say, 'Late again, eh?' For retailers and customers, late shipping is cumulative. For creators and publishers, late shipping is a purely relative matter; if the book is bimonthly and issue four ships sixty days after issue three, they are on schedule. Since there are more retailers and customers than there are creators and publishers, their interpretation of reality is the one which prevails.

Late shipping results from slow production. Slow production results from not producing pages fast enough. Not producing pages fast enough results from underestimating the length of time it takes to produce a finished page and overestimating the value of unfinished work. A pencilled page is *not* a finished page. A plotted page is not a finished page. A cover is not an issue.

In order to fix the problem of self-deception about your productivity you need an external, undeniable yardstick of productivity. We call these clocks and calendars. Here's an easy test for you as a potential self-publisher. Sit down to do a finished page. You are starting with a blank piece of art board. When you are done, it will be the pencilled, inked and lettered page one of issue one. Look at the clock when you start. 10 a.m. (let's say). Work on your page. After you've been working on the page for a while, picture in your mind what time it is. If you picture in your mind that it is eleven-fifteen, and you look at the clock and it's noon, you have just discovered something about your productivity. You are considerably slower than you think you are. If you want to compete in the market, you are going to have to go faster. Not frantically faster, or sloppily faster; smoothly faster, efficiently faster. There are things on any given page that you know how to do and there are things you don't know how to do. You have to do the things you know how to do smoothly and efficiently to buy yourself enough time to solve the problem you don't know how to solve, yet. You have to learn how to pencil, ink, write and letter instinctively. If you have solved the problems with the first three panels, finishing them is a purely technical exercise: solid black goes here, thick lines go here. Start visualising solutions to the part of the page you're uncertain about while your unconscious 'zen' mind is finishing the technical exercise. Build confidence and efficiency in yourself. Once you have done everything on a page that you know how to do, the parts you don't know how to do become a surrounded enemy. Start whittling away at the uncertain part; if you know what the gesture and clothes are, do the gesture and the clothes. Check the time frequently, always picturing what time it is before you check. There are good mantras: 'I know how to do this', 'I can solve this problem', 'this is not that difficult', 'I'm not happy with the way this turned out, but I will do better on the next one,' 'what can I do, right now, right this second, to get my book closer to completion?', 'this is easy', 'this is fun'.

It is, you know. Smooth-and-efficient *is* fun.

CEREBUS

NO. 181 **APRIL 1994**

DAVE SIM
President

GERHARD
Vice-President

LINDA BERZINS
Typesetting

MOTHERS & DAUGHTERS
a novel

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BOOK ONE
(Cerebus 151 to Cerebus 162)
Flight

•

BOOK TWO
(Cerebus 163 to Cerebus 174)
Women

•

BOOK THREE
(Cerebus 175 to Cerebus 186)
Reads

•

BOOK FOUR
(Cerebus 187 to Cerebus 200)

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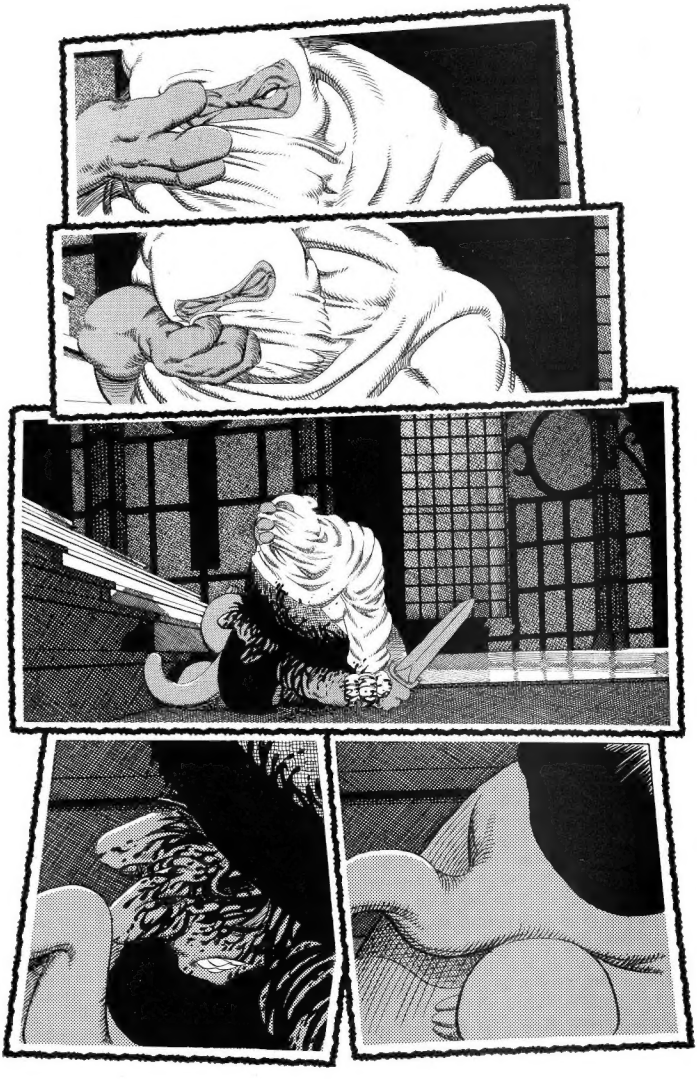
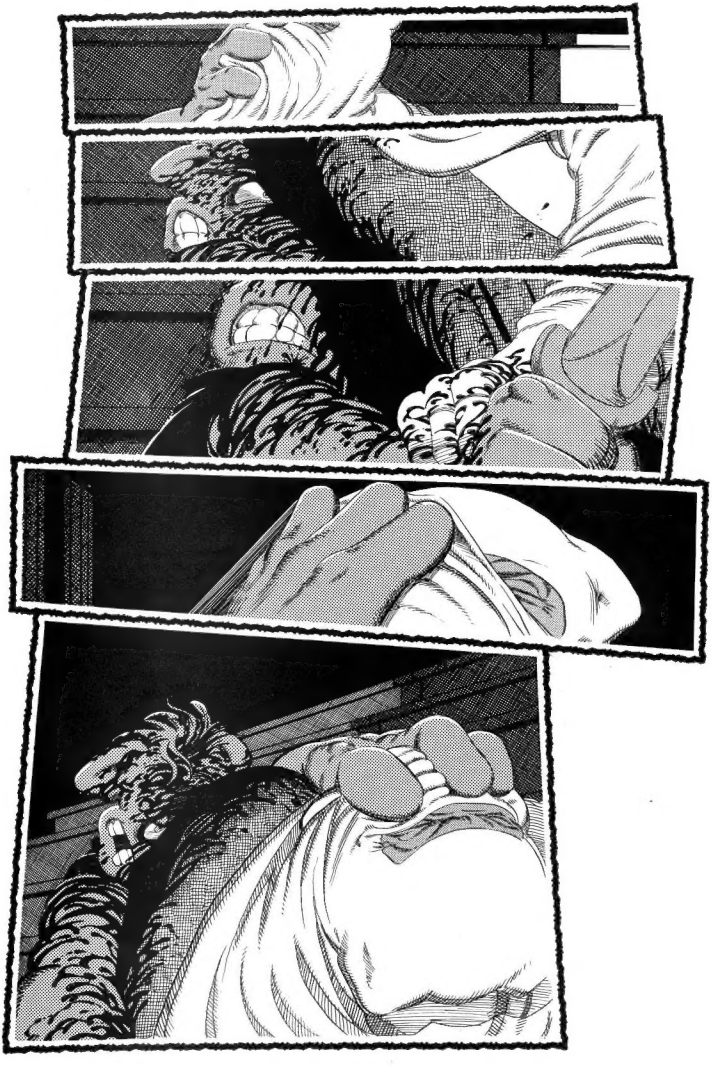
CRAV





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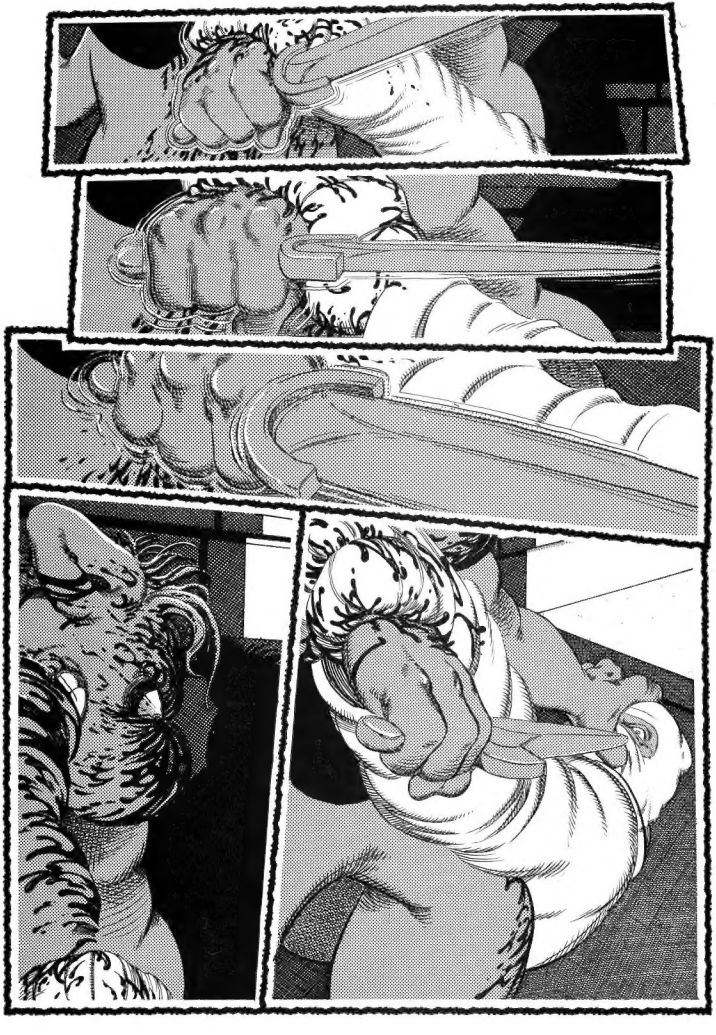

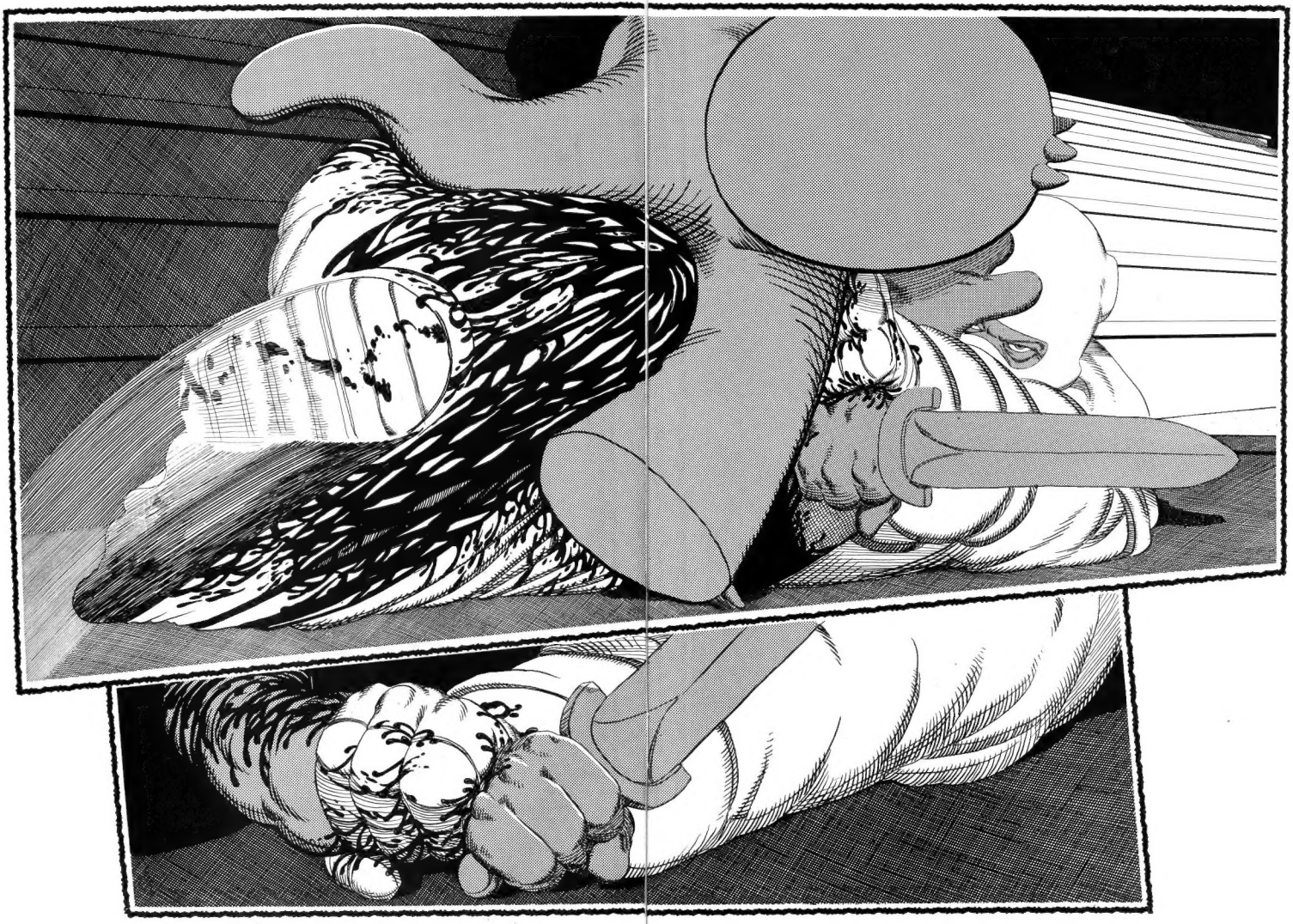

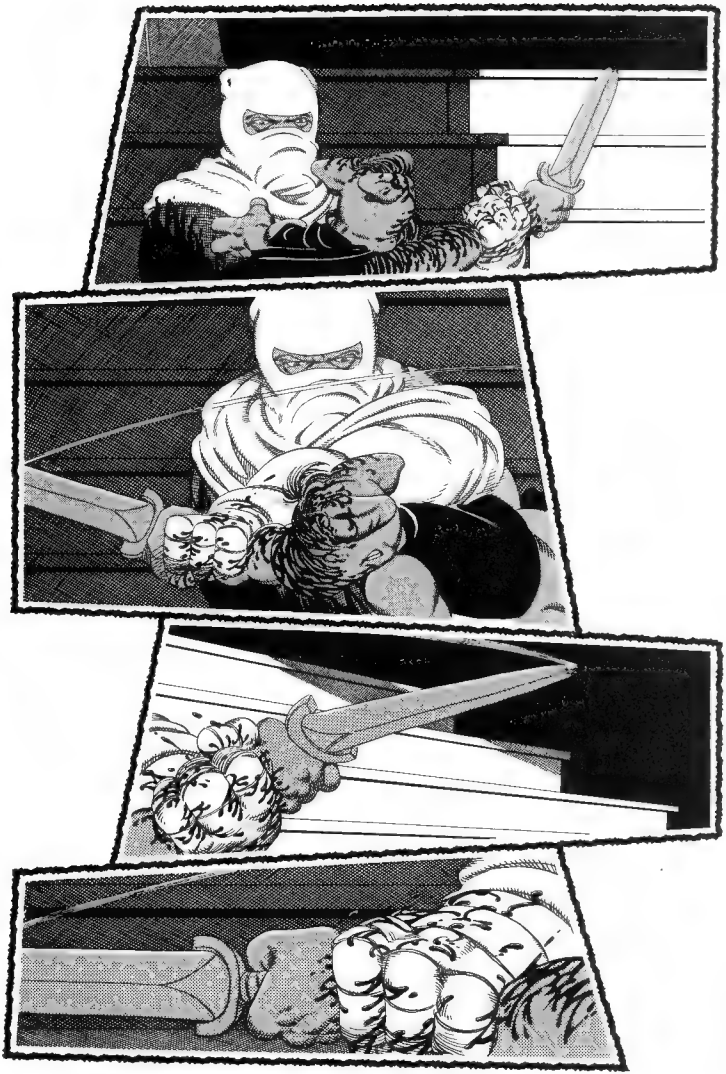

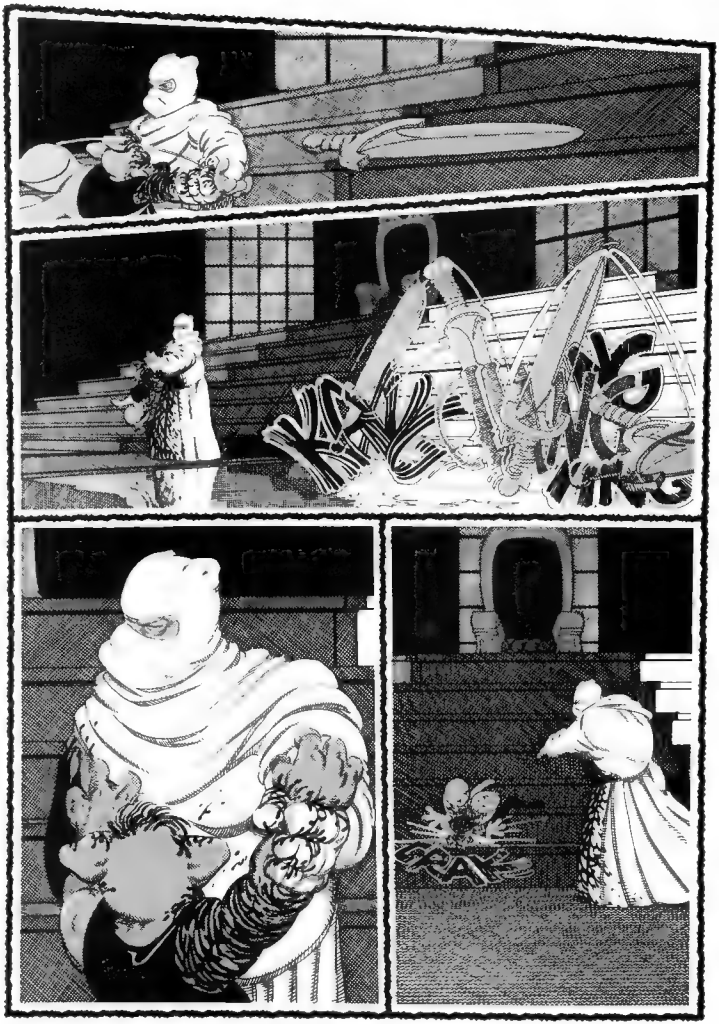
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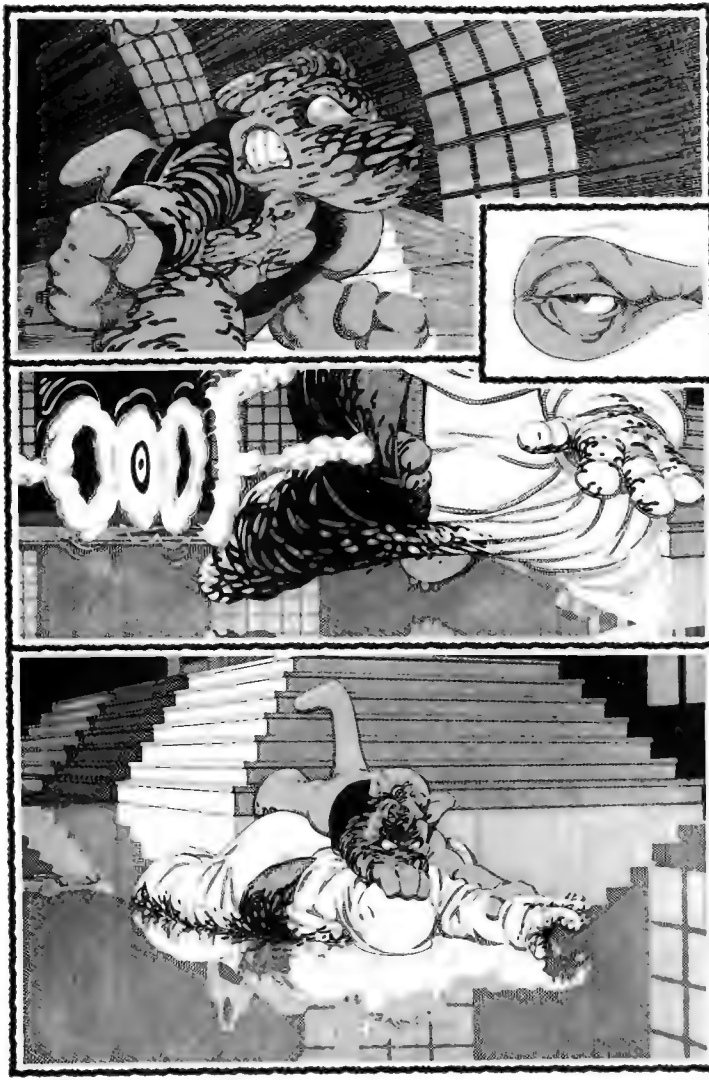


Viktor Davis turned away from his drawing board. Through a metaphorical haze of cigarette smoke and with perfect equanimity, he regarded his audience (as they, in their turn, regarded him). Their total number was only relatively *certain — something in excess of the capacity of Maple Leaf Gardens but considerably less than could be accommodated by the confines of SkyDome. Chronologically, they were* separated from him by a period of several weeks: logistically, by the mechanical requirements of reproduction.

'. . . *so, kitchee-koo, you bastards!*'

Robert Crumb
Zap Comix

The invocation of things analogous being the stock in trade of any storyteller, for Viktor Davis to conjure himself in the minds of his readers, to bring the picture of his overarching circumstance into sharper focus, required a fictitious figure (the irony of which, he was sure, would soon become apparent): Scheherezade.

It was Scheherezade, reluctant and fictitious wife of a domineering and fictitious king, who forestalled her execution by means of the stories which gave the *1,001 Arabian Nights* their name. Each story told, each night of the telling, bought her another day of life. Her imminent death hung over her like the Sword of Damocles (the courtier who overpraised the happiness of the despotic tyrant Dionysius and who was forced to sit at a banquet under a sword suspended by a single hair, that he might learn the perilous nature of that happiness). Like most stories which endure, Scheherezade and the Sword of Damocles were parables, and these two parables were very near and dear to the heart of Viktor Davis. Though uncertain of the size or shape of the sword suspended above him, though uncertain of the strength of the hair which held it, though uncertain (if truth be told) of its very existence, he had lived with the awareness of it and the fear attendant upon that awareness for much of his adult life. After a time, he had wearied of that fear — so much so that he decided, ultimately, that he would rather be dead than afraid. Though he had never spoken the words aloud, nor committed them to paper (before yesterday), he could approximate their internal sentiment.

'If you want to kill me, then kill me. If I were you, I wouldn't want someone like me walking around loose. There are a lot of things easier to do than three hundred issues of a comic book and, frankly, I put 'dying prematurely' in that category. So, either kill me or leave me alone to finish the story. Either way, no hard feelings.'

To whom did Viktor Davis address these words? To whom, indeed. All in good time, thought Viktor, all in good time.

As invocation is of a like nature with sympathetic magic, and in view of the fact that recent 'Q-rating' results had placed Scheherezade and Damocles well below the index required for a guest spot on the *Today* show or a supporting role in a made-for-TV movie, Viktor Davis (whose 'Q-rating' was substantially lower, even, than that) thought that some more universal and modern archetype was required to accomplish his task.

Jeff Smith.

No, not *that* Jeff Smith (though there was inherent in the need for qualification a genuine victory more synchronistic than coincidental: a victory comparable to a recent news item Viktor had seen, telling of the recent divorce of comic-*book* character Dick Tracy). The Jeff Smith in question was the protagonist of Frank Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, the story of a simple man who conducts a one-man filibuster against overwhelming odds, in the face of deceitful, corrupt and nearly limitless power, in his fight for Truth.

In the interests of maintaining connection with generations dead to such sensibilities, Viktor would here like to express a willingness to amend the proper noun to the more modernistically palatable 'truth' (quotes optional). To completely forestall any accusation of demagoguery (if such inference be genuinely at subjective risk), the reader is advised to substitute 'reality' as a lowest-common-denominator concession to our cynical age. At all events, let the essence of the image suffice:

Jeff Smith playing (and here was the crux of the matter) *within the boundaries of the established rules*, holding the floor of the United States Senate. So long as he remained standing — Viktor Davis was grateful that no such requirement existed for the completion of *his* story — so long as he yielded the floor only for a point of order, he could keep talking 'from now 'til Doomsday, Mr. Speaker.'

For Viktor Davis, the temporal constraint was more finite: nine years and eleven months.

Jeff Smith. Scheherezade. And the Sword of Damocles.

(absolute) Elsewhere, invisible hands adjusted the settings of metaphorical lights. The atmosphere changed slightly; the molecules composing it grew heavier, denser. From the center of the unfurnished stage, nothing was visible now but a single, unblinking white eye. Viktor's silence seemed to stretch interminably.

'Autobiography,' he said quietly, removing a pack of Viscount 1's and a Bic lighter from his hip pocket. He extracted a single cigarette and lit it slowly, theatrically, savouring the moment. He remembered seeing Hal Holbrook's *An Evening with Mark Twain* in his teens.

You could have heard a pin drop in the second balcony.

Interminable and unusable passages, literary practice swings, both typed and handwritten, marked the weeks-long and painful progress which had at last brought him here: to this point. Though it might be supposed that familiarity with the raw materials would make autobiography the easiest of creative enterprises, such had not been the case. As *was* the case (Viktor was sure) with anyone, conversations from his past, a handful in number, glowed within his memory with vivid life. But as he transcribed them, as he nailed them to the page, crucifying them, syllable by badly constructed syllable, they were robbed of that life, rendered meaningless or (even worse) imbued with false meaning. At day's end, as he reread the fruits of his labours, his verdict upon his work was absolute, inescapable.

It was not the Truth. It was not truth. It most especially was not reality.

'Now, let me tell you of my *love.'*

Barry Windsor-Smith
'The Beguiling'

And so it was that after many days of raucous debate, doomed attempts at effecting a compromise, and many dealings both above-board and behind the scenes, a motion was brought forward. There, in the deepest, innermost recesses of his being, in the Viktor Davis House of Commons, which was solely responsible for the direction and governance of his very existence (the Viktor Davis Senate and the Victor Davis Governor-General's Office having been abolished with the repatriating of his constitution in 1983 by a decree from the Viktor Davis Privy Council, which made unlawful the imposition of any Queen as head of state — titular or otherwise), a Bill, properly framed and tabled, was presented for consideration: 'Be it Hereby Resolved that We Believe Autobiography to be, by its very Nature, intrinsically False and Nonsensical.' The Bill passed by a wide margin on First Reading, support for it as near to complete unanimity as could be imagined, cutting, as it did, across party lines and many ancient loyalties. But, after the desk-thumping and the hand-shaking, the back-slapping and the paper-throwing, had subsided and Order was once more restored, that Esteemed Chamber yet found itself contemplating many blank pages, yawning column inches of white newsprint, with no plan or agenda, program or proposal, for filling them.

As any devotee of parliamentary democracy (well, *this* parliamentary democracy, anyway) could tell you, it was within just such a vacuum of policy, driven by and coupled with the pressing need for an innovative and imaginative solution, that a Private Member's Bill (usually an empty 'coals-to-Newcastle' gesture of Don Quixote-like proportions, sown with seeds of its own destruction) stood the greatest chance of passing into Law.

The Hon. Member for Verity-Centre rises in his place and addresses the House:

'Mr. Speaker, while I have seldom, both for reasons of missed opportunity and disinclination, taken the trouble to address this Body — interest in the Genuinely Verifiable having been, for some time, in great disfavour with my colleagues despite, or perhaps because of, their belief that the Apprehended is synonymous with the Objectively Truthful . . .'

Some Hon. Members: Ah, siddown. We haven't got time for this [etc.].

Speaker: Order.

'Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I have been following the protracted debate over the filling of the text pages in the second half of "Reads" with what is, for me, unusually keen interest. I believe that the contributions to that debate, representations made by the Members for Competitiveness, Entertainment, Craft, Inspiration, Posterity and the others, which on the surface may seem to be contradictory, which at face value appear unresolvable, are, in clear point of fact, aspects of a single tapestry, woven with a common thread. That thread, if my colleagues will indulge me, is Verity.'

Some Hon. Members: Oh, oh.

Speaker: Order.

'Thank you, Mr. Speaker. It has not escaped my attention that I am, more often than not, considered by my colleagues to be something of a liability in this chamber — most particularly, a liability to the carrying out of the creative business which so occupies the greatest majority of our collective attention. However, Mr. Speaker, on this occasion I feel that I might have a genuine contribution to make to the debate which concerns us here.'

Hon. Member for Inking: You mean like the time you asked, how do we know that india ink is really black?

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear [laughter].

Speaker: Order.

'Thank you, Mr. Speaker. While I propose no sweeping thematic link for the entirety of the second half of "Reads", I feel that the simple inclusion of these extracts, this very exchange, comes nearer the mark in the laying of a foundation in the matter of a Viktor Davis Autobiography than do any of the myriad contributions rejected previously. I would venture to say that since the very nature of our debate centers on a point of departure — "square one", if the Member for Transitional Issues will forgive me a small plagiarism — the existence of this House and the nature and type of its debate are indispensable in accomplishing that task.'

To no one's great surprise, the Private Member's Bill ('Be it Hereby Resolved that the Existence of this House Serve as the Foundation for The First Part of Viktor Davis' Autobiography') passed unanimously (the Members from Convention and Privacy casting the only dissenting votes). As the Member for Verity-Centre was surrounded by his colleagues, each pressing forward to offer congratulations, the lights in the chamber began to flicker and dim. The plush coverings on the chamber seats darkened from a wine-red to a deep burgundy and at last to a dull black as a complete and utter darkness swiftly descended.

Awareness returned gradually, as it might to a senile octogenarian in a retirement home, or a dreamer upon awakening. The vivid after-image of the House, impressed upon the retina of its observer, faded and became insubstantial. And then vanished. A new reality supplanted it (as well as the distressing thought that the new reality might prove to be no more verifiable, no less transitory than its predecessor). All was darkness.

Somewhere in the distance, a single radiant white light flashed blindingly into life.

The white wing-backed chair seemed real enough (its fabric dazzling to the eye with the unexpected brilliance of new illumination). The stage, of course, was both familiar and quite different; irregularities, a certain shabbiness, were visible, at closer proximity, in the painted floorboards.

Lounging in an identical chair (which was turned at an angle complementary to the first), close enough to touch, sat Viktor Davis, lighting another cigarette. He took a long drag from it, expelling the smoke in a few small, irregular rings and then an emphatic cloud, which undid his most recent handiwork. In the silence and darkness beyond the footlights, it was unclear whether the twenty thousand seats were empty or not.

'Audiences,' he said, as if the single word explained everything.

'An intellectual is someone whose mind watches itself. I am happy to be both halves, the watcher and the watched.'

Albert Camus

AARDVARK COMMENT

P.O. BOX 1674, STATION 'C', KITCHENER, ONTARIO N2G 4R2

Dave,

About MAXX. It's actually pretty good. I'm really surprised (you know, being an Image comic and being good at the same time. What a concept!).

What? Oh come on! Somebody out there must have read it! Anyway, it's good. It almost reminded me of *Cerebus* (almost).

Bruce Harper
6500 Miller's Grove
Mississauga, Ontario

I think it's very sad that so many people who universally deplore Image haven't even given the Maxx a *try*. Sam Kieth phoned me a while ago to insist that I had to write my version of *Understanding Comics* (just as an aside, I think this is comparable to dragging an old blues player out of the Louisiana Bayou to a music academy symposium and asking him to explain the underlying significance of his innovative irresonance. "Wal, suh, d'E string done broke an' ah dint have annuda one, so I tuk d' A string frum mah geetah ah done bust' ovuh muh ol' lady's haid a year oh so back an' I put it on, but ah lef' it sorta, you know, loose like. Dat did d'trick, yassuh.'). When I told him there wasn't a snowball's chance in hell of my doing that, I volunteered to check the *Maxx* issues out and tell him if I saw anything that needed fixing, or any ideas I thought he could try. So, thanks for the segue, Bruce.

Sam, the *Maxx* is great and I never miss an issue. The Dr. Seuss bit was especially effective. You have a unique and enjoyable blend here and it is the only creation from the Frazetta school (for want of a better definition) that I like, visually. My old pal Bill Loebs does a wonderful job on the dialogue. I would no more think of offering you any advice than I would think of offering advice to George Herriman or Vaughn Bode. You're the only one who ever has or ever will know how to do the Maxx properly.

So there.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Well, it's over. So before I crash for a good many hours, here's how the *Cerebus/Hepcats Holiday Telethon* went.

154 callers. $6014.75.

Wow.

I wasn't lying when I said *Cerebus* readers were the greatest fans in the world.

My deepest and most heartfelt thanks go out to all *Cerebus* fans who called up and contributed over the weekend, especially those from such locales as the UK, France, Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand. (I was *hoping* to connect with some of the international readers.) The entire telethon exceeded my expectations (to say the least). Thank you all.

It was a terrific way to end a week in which I finally sent *Hepcats* 11 to press, all 56 pages of it, and to begin the week in which I plan to marathon issue 12, which has to ship in January. Then I intend to spend a weekend in New Orleans (and no, I'm not calling anyone) reabsorbing the local color before launching into the Big Easy sequence of *Snowblind*.

I am now more convinced than ever that it was the correct decision not to travel anywhere (with the exception of our festival) in 1994. The fact that all this money gets to go to publication and printing bills as opposed to plane tickets, hotel rooms, booth spaces, expensive dinners, even more expensive hotel bar drinks, UPS and drayage fees, etc., etc., is such a relief I cannot tell you. Hey, with this telethon I made three times the money I made in San Diego in one-third the time and without any of the expenses!

Apparently, the current joke is that *Hepcats* is so late I must have sold the book to Image. If 1994 goes as well as planned, productivity-wise, I may not hit the road again until 1997 (which will be *Hepcats'* 10th anniversary and deserving of some kind of celebration). After settling the last of my personal debts in the spring and hitting the con circuit way too heavily this summer, it's time to get back to what I got into this business to do in the first place: write and draw

Deepest thanks, once again, to all who gave their support over the telethon, and even deeper thanks to everyone who has stuck by me through the lean times. I always land on my feet. Remember that.

Gonna go to bed, but I wanted to fax this off before I did. The CRT is getting blurry before my eyes. I have a lot of drawing to do tomorrow. So nobody call.

Sincerely,

Martin Wagner
Double Diamond Press
P.O. Box 27517
Austin, TX

USA 78755-2157

So, if anybody called Martin on December 7th, shame on you.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dave,

Remember way back in 103 when, in the Note from the President, you hinted at some possible connections between certain popular twentieth century diseases (AIDS and lung cancer) and radiation poisoning?

And have you heard about all the terrible, nasty, radioactive things the U.S. government is admitting to having done to people without their knowledge?

Can it be only a coincidence?

I'm beginning to think more seriously about your postulation that strategically placed chunks of plutonium could be the real cause of AIDS. Really. Maybe that HIV virus story is a sham. Maybe it's a fiction maintained by some malevolent force (the U.S. government?) to cover up the fact that they are regularly exposing targeted individuals to dangerous doses of radiation. Of course there have to be countless innocent victims in order to maintain the illusion of a valid epidemic.

Dave, you seem to be six years

ahead of the news. What's really going on? How much do you know?

I'm scared.

Andrew Coltrin
2041 W Brichta Dr.
Tucson, AZ
USA 85745

Well, the AIDS story just doesn't wash for me. I mean, how many rock stars were fucking like rabbits through the 1970's and 1980's? A groupie who admitted to fucking most of the Montreal Canadiens died of AIDS a while ago. There was the same massive outcry in favour of universal testing that happened after Magic Johnson. And then . . . zip. Nada. I think they were afraid to find out a) a good percentage of professional sports players *were* HIV-positive but weren't dead or dying b) you can fuck like a rabbit and NOT be HIV positive OR have AIDS, neither of which fits the Cirinist/Kevillist agenda. I think some people get AIDS and some don't. Some people get cancer and some don't, so it stands to reason, doesn't it? Why isn't Rock Hudson's live-in lover for the last year of his life dead? Among the ultra-famous casualties we have Liberace, Rock Hudson, and Freddie Mercury. There is a LOT more fucking than that going on in Hollywood and backstage at rock concerts and there was certainly a LOT more than that going on in the 70's and 80's. David Bowie looks pretty healthy to me.

★★★★★★★★★★

To Dave's Advice Column, Confessional, and Sociopolitical Debate Forum:

Hey, now that I've broke the ice and written once, I might as well do it again, right?

Re: the book. The back half proceeds apace. The front half remains interesting as well; it's not the sophisticated interweaving of multiple, allegorical story layers that (as my last letter indicates) I expected after #176, but the evocative descriptions of Victor's shifting mental state almost make up for that.

I have no stories, good or bad, about the treatment of Cerebus at my local store, since I don't have a local store. I just get your book via UPS from *Westfield* (free plug: I've been using 'em for ten years, they're a great service) at a substantial discount, along with all my other comics.

What really got me to write again, frankly, were the latest permutations of that pool of typesetting in these "hollow halls." It seems that after a period of actual concrete, critical discussions of the little grey guy and the industry in general, things are drifting back toward missives from the lovelorn and the politically pissed-off. The difference is that last time you were on a forced sabbatical from the lettercol; this time you're back, and people are writing with the intention of getting your opinion in response.

Don't get me wrong; I've always enjoyed the lettercol, and I have confidence in your ability to keep it open and unpredictable, regardless of whether or not your voice is present in bold type. But I found myself thinking, why do people write such personal letters to this column? I mean, it's a safe bet that most of them don't know you personally, any more than they know the other 25,000+ people who'll be reading their words if they see print. And it seems odd to ask for your advice; I mean, okay, you're a brilliant writer/artist, but as far as life goes your opinions seem pretty particular to your own experiences, and no offense, but those experiences don't seem like testimony to the flawlessness of your social decision-making. Yet, like so many others, I feel the appeal of these pages; the compulsion to write and share my stream of consciousness with you and, perhaps, your readers. Why is this?

Well, I've got an idea. In today's media-drenched culture, it's a fact that people feel legitimized by becoming part of the flood. Things experienced on a merely individual level can seem, almost, less real than things validated by the transient glow of the public spotlight: if it's put out there for the world to see it must be important, right? On reflection that doesn't seem too healthy, however; it's a great way to lose one's sense of self. But here in the pages of Aardvark Comment, it's possible to strike a tenuous balance: it's a public display, yes, but an extremely iconoclastic one; the "public" who comprise this subculture all filter their worldviews through at least one common experience, this book, thus establishing a sense of intimacy — well, almost — that does not overwhelm the self. You've got something fairly rare here, Dave.

That said, I'll go ahead and share a story that neatly unites both the "lovelorn" and the "political" themes. A few years ago, while I was in law school, I was picking up some extra money by working for one of those big test-preparation organizations, tutoring people who wanted to get into law school (more fools they, but I didn't tell them that) on how to pass the LSAT exam. I tried to keep my classes on a fairly informal level and get to know the students, which was easy since there were seldom more than a half-dozen of them at a time; we even went out for drinks as a group occasionally after the sessions. Well, there was one particular girl (who shall remain nameless, which is easy, since I'm not sure I remember her name at this point) in one group with whom I seemed to hit it off pretty well. So I waited 'til after the course was over — just to avoid any appearance of favoritism, impropriety, or conflict of interest — called her up, and asked her out to lunch

Lunch, right?" As harmless as you get. And she responded with a happy "yes," and we made arrangements.

Well, the day before the date, I get a message on my machine: she's fallen sick, can't make it. Okay. I try to call back, miss her, try again another day, catch her, ask if we can reschedule. She says no, she's "really busy." I didn't know what caused the sudden change in attitude, but the message was pretty clear, so I didn't call her again.

I figured, them's the breaks. Closed book, right?

Until two weeks later, when I'm meeting with my boss at this test prep company, previously a very friendly guy, and he gets all serious and tells me that "one of my former students complained to him that I was harassing her for a date." I explain what I just explained here, but he says no go; it's not that fraternizing with students is prohibited, it's just that you have to know absolutely that any social advances will not give offense. Sounded like a bit of a catch-22 to me, but it was too late anyway: I got raked over the coals, accused of the sort of behavior I find reprehensible in others, came this close to losing a good job, and had my relationship with my boss ruined, all because this girl went over my head to stab me in the

back, as it were, rather than just telling me she wasn't interested.

Now I ask you (and everyone), what did I miss that I should have done differently to avoid this? It seems to me that one of the reasons gender relations are in such a frightening state in this country today is not that there are no rules; it's just that too many of the rules are written ex post facto.

Anyway. Heh. "Hollow halls." I love it.

Ramblingly yours,

Chris J. Miller
3633 North Leavitt Street #2
Chicago, Illinois
USA 60618

Okay, one more example and then I'll answer your question. Dan!

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Well, I said I'd let you know what happened . . .

I didn't wait for an issue of Cerebus with **Meg Chase's** name in it to come out before choosing another course of action. That's not really surprising, since I didn't know if you would even print the letter I sent. Can't you see me checking out the Aardvark Comment of issue #300, going "Damn! I guess he isn't going to print it!"

So instead I chose #1: Asking her to study for a test with me. I asked her at dinner one night. She was in the dining hall, sitting with her roommate. It was 5:30 p.m. (this is important). I went over, and asked her if she wanted to study with me for our Sociology test, which was tomorrow. She agreed, and we set up a time from 6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. in the library.

I got over to the library shortly before 6:00 p.m., and waited . . .

. . . and waited . . .

. . . and waited.

Finally, at 7:00 p.m., I began to wonder if we had both been talking about the same library. Determined to find out why she didn't show up, I went to her dorm and tracked her down (I didn't know which room she lived in).

Eventually I found her. The look on her face when she saw me said it all, but she told me anyway: "I'm so sorry! I forgot!'. She . . . forgot. In a span of 30 short minutes, she . . . forgot.

Trying to salvage something from this terrible confrontation, I asked her if she wanted to stay up later (like, 11:00 p.m., or so) and study. She couldn't — she had a lot of work to finish, and then she was going to bed. She asked me if I would be okay for the test. Of course I would, I thought. I asked you to study so I could talk to you for two hours, not because I needed to study.

So that's my disappointing tale. Maybe something can be saved, though. I'll give her a copy of *Cerebus* #178, and maybe it'll, I dunno, shock her into coolness or something. Heck, maybe you'll get a new reader.

Once again, I'll let you know what happens . . .

Dan Parker
Castleton State College
Box B12
Castleton, VT
USA 05735

P.S. Thanks for the bold type. That was really cool.

P.P.S. I gbt an A- in Intro to Sociology.

New rule the chicks instituted a few years ago without telling anyone, guys. If they say 'yes' and then don't show up (get this) they didn't want to hurt your feelings. No shit. And these people are still allowed to vote. The idea is that if they say 'yes' in person or over the phone, then they don't have to see the look on your face when they say 'no'. When they don't show up or are unavailable for a return call, then you are supposed to get the message. Always (ALWAYS) have something else planned for the night of a date: a movie you want to see, a hockey game on TV, *something*. Take along a newspaper to wherever you arranged to meet them. Give them fifteen minutes. If they don't show, split and enjoy your plan B. Do not phone them. Do not seek them out. The next time you see them, do not look at them as if they just shot your dog. If they ask you where *you* were, tell them you forgot (casually, not with an air of astonishment as if aliens just landed in front of you). Do not ask them out somewhere else. They were late. They were wrong. If they ask about the two of you doing something else, ask what they have in mind. If it is the two of you, go along with it. Great — I'll see you there at . . . whatever time. If they mention a bunch of their friends are going to . . . then ditch. They want you in their fan club. Move on to the next chick and forget that one . . . completely.

Every guy makes up his own mind about the time you spend waiting to see if she shows. Fifteen minutes is my maximum. Anything past thirty minutes and you are a putz, pure and simple.

Say you aren't the same Dan Parker that Jennifer here is talking about, are you?

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave and Dan Parker,

I once met someone who gave me a comic book.

Pros: I fell in love with him.

Cons: I can't think of any offhand.

True Story . . .

Sincerely,

Jennifer Kranzle (A girl who definitely cares about comics)
86 Fulton Street
Lake Grove, NY
USA 11755

You kids keep us posted on any late-breaking developments, now.

★★★★★★★★★★

"Siddhartha," he said, "we are now old men. We may never see each other again in this life. I can see, my dear friend, that you have found peace. I realize that I have not found it. Tell me one word, my esteemed friend tell me somethng that I can conceive, something I can understand! Give me something to help me on my way, Siddhartha. My path is often hard and dark."

Siddhartha was silent and looked at him with his calm, peaceful smile. Govinda looked steadily in his face, with anxiety, with longing. Suffering, continual seeking and continual failure were written in his look.

Siddhartha saw it and smiled.

"Bend near me!" he whispered in Govinda's ear. "Come, still nearer, quite close! Kiss me on the forehead, Govinda."

Although surprised, Govinda was compelled by a great love and presentiment to obey him; he leaned close to him and touched his forehead with his lips. As he did this, something wonderful happened to him. While he was still dwelling on Siddhartha's strange words, while even a certain contempt for his friend's words conflicted with a tremendous love and esteem for

him, this happened to him.

He no longer saw the face of his friend Siddhartha. Instead he saw other faces — hundreds, thousands, which all came and disappeared and yet all seemed to be there at the same time, which all continually changed and renewed themselves and which were yet all Siddhartha."

pages 149-150 of *Siddhartha (1922)* by Hermann Hesse (1877 1962)

Hi, Dave. Have you ever read this? It puts me much to mind of how you envision Suenteus Po's 'Echoes' in your own novels. I am *extremely* curious about this. By the way, my name is MAX INK. We met a Central City Comics in Columbus, OH, the day before the Mid-Ohio-Con. I am a self published small press comic book artist/writer/letterer. My most recent work has been *Amoeba Adventures*, published by Protoplasm Press (c/o Nik Dirga P.O. 2230, University, MS 36877). I hope that you enjoyed number eleven of AA that I gave you. Expect more . . . numbers twelve and thirteen are due at my humble abode any day now.

Another item I'd like to write you about (and everyone else if this letter is printed) is about promoting self published books, whether small press (photo-copied) or big press (black and white . . . even color . . . with a real comic book cover), which is what your Note was about in *Cerebus* 176. You made some good points about buying a table at a Con (which is exactly what a number of my fellow small pressers do) . . . but I've learned to do something different. When I call up the organizer of a show, I introduce myself as an *Artist.* boom. Suddenly, I'm a Guest. Free Table. No waiting. Some organizers feel if you're selling books, you buy a table. Others Convention organizers give Artists a free table and promote them as guest of the show (Jeff Bruce 1-800-859-1594 being the most gentlemanly of them all). Although, I never thought about your suggestion concerning teaming up with retailers at the con. Another promotion idea that I've done in the past is to appear (at least) once a month at my usual store for a "one man show" that I've advertised and so forth with assistance from the manager As a suggestion to other creators, pick a day (any day) that you'd set aside each month, or week (if you have the time), to spend at your favorite store (as long as there's space available and the manager is willing), set up a card table and . . . boom. Insta-Guest Artist. It's the best publisher-retailer Direct-Link Action possible. Remember . . . it is *very* important to advertise. Set out copies of your comic on the store counter to be sold and remember, once everything is set up, start drawing! Anyone who buys the book will get a free sketch of one of the characters. On every sketch that I hand out at the Cons and such, I already have my name and address printed on it. I've known lots of kids who get excited seeing an Artist at work. I've also answered thousands of questions about self publishing.

Rambunny and Prometheus meet some gray guy with his tone missing.

The gentleman that I work with on Amoeba Adventures, Nik Dirga (he created the characters back in 1987 . . . I've only been drawing them on and off for the past year) has said that I sell copies of the book "like a demon". I've also been called one of the "coolest artists at any Con". It's all a matter of enjoying your time at the Con (or at a store) and looking at the whole thing as a chance to meet future (and sometimes present) readers of *your* book. *Your creation.*

As a little side note . . . while waiting at the Dave Sim/Martin Wagner/James Owen signing at *Central City Comics,* I took out my artwork for Amoeba and started jamming outside the store . . . in less than two minutes, I was

answering questions about the comic and sold a couple of books. I always try to bring copies of the comic and a sketch book wherever I go. Even to the library.

Onwards.

MAX INK
276 Mainsail Drive
Westerville, OH
USA 43081

Very nice meeting you. With an attitude like that you are definitely going places.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave,

Almost every woman in the world is completely insane. Just wanted to point that out, in case you hadn't noticed. Artists in particular.

Mark Yturralde
5622 Dartford Street
San Diego, CA
USA 92120

I think that women are completely insane from the male point of view and that men are completely insane from the female point of view. Both views are completely rational from their respective vantage points.

★★★★★★★★★★

Dear Dave & Gerhard:

I have to quibble a bit with a comment made by Eric Baker in his letter in #178. Eric states that probably less than ten members of the Science Fiction Writers of America can support their families from their writing. I've been an author of prose science fiction and fantasy for quite a number of years now and have a very good idea how well my colleagues do financially. The figure is more like fifty, with another 150 like me who make enough that, thanks to a working spouse, don't have to have a day job.

I agree with his main point, though, which is that writers of prose fiction aren't terribly well paid. We do keep our copyrights and we have greater freedom to write what we want than do most comic book writers, but making a living is hard.

I'm greatly enjoying the *Mothers and Daughters* storyline. The long sections of Victor Reid stuff leave me a bit impatient, since I buy *Cerebus* expecting to read at a comic book pace, but using text does allow you to develop Cerebus's world in a way you wouldn't have room for if done in normal graphic story format. I'll keep reading.

I've been reading *Cerebus* since #28, in fact. 150 issues (plus the back issues, of course). I saw that issue on the stands, recalled your name from *Quack!* and an issue of Murray Moore's fanzine *Fazz Bazz*, and figured I'd give it a try. You once said you didn't think anybody who read that issue (the second Mind Games story) would ever buy another, but I found it fascinating and have scooped up every issue since as they appear (except #151, which I still can't find). I also have the *Swords* and phone book collections. *Sandman* is the only other title I buy regularly.

I picked up #178 in mid-January. That's the first time it's arrived before the very end of the cover month in many, many years. Congratulations for bringing the schedule more in line with the industry standard. And say, how about reprinting the map that was in #29 some time soon?

Best,

Dave Smeds
Santa Rosa, CA
USA 95409

The map! Yes. Yes, of course. I'm *sure* I have it around here somewhere.

★★★★★★★★★★

Sometimes when I'm urinating, I wonder how other people do their laundry. I mean does Dave Sim do his own laundry? Does he have his own washer and dryer and if he does, do you suppose his dryer ever overheats and his clothes have to stay in the washer a bit longer, smoldering and collecting mildew and that awful smell of being too ripe from sitting stale in the washer too long? I remember sometimes other people would mention their laundry, like, you know, "this is my last clean shirt, I've got to do laundry." And at those moments it occurred to me that, yeah, my friends do laundry also, but I still wonder about Dave Sim.

Greg Vandruska
316-B Stadium Drive
Tallahassee, FL
USA 32304

Actually I have a very nice housekeeper named Mary who comes in every Wednesday and does my laundry, cleaning and dishes.

PERSONAL APPEARANCES 1994

CAPITAL CITY TRADE SHOW
MAY 2, 3
ST. LOUIS, MO
Cervantes Convention Center

JUNE 4
SAN JOSE, CA
Alternative Press Expo
(contact Dan Vado 408-971-8929)

JUNE 8
SALT LAKE CITY, UTAH
Night Flight Comics
Cottonwood Mall

JUNE 10
BETHESDA, MD
Small Press Expo
8400 Wisonsin Ave.
Info: (301) 840-0520

DIAMOND SEMINAR
JUNE 12–14
BALTIMORE, MD
Baltimore Convention Center

JULY 29–31
DALLAS, TX
DALLAS FANTASY FAIR
Dallas Market Hall

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
COMICS AUSTRALIA DISTRIBUTION/OZCON III RETAILER CONFERENCE

FEBRUARY 4, 1994

I would like to thank George and Christine Vlastaras for inviting me to talk to all of you today and to welcome you to the OZCON III Retailer Conference.

The direct market has changed.

And the direct market has *not* changed.

I think that much of the confusion and anxiety you are feeling in the aftermath of the blackest fourth quarter of any year since the direct market began can be attributed to the on-going and mistaken notion that comic book companies create comic books.

Marvel isn't bad and DC isn't good. Valiant comic books aren't bad and Defiant comic books are not good. Marvel, DC, Valiant and Defiant are piles of paper filed in their local jurisdictions which entitle them to conduct business. If, in the course of conducting business, Valiant can attract someone like Barry Windsor-Smith to exert his nearly limitless creative abilities on their behalf, they are a far stronger company for it. When Barry Windsor-Smith chooses to leave them for ostensibly greener pastures, they are severely weakened as a company.

I wrote a piece in the *Comics Journal* some years ago called 'A Declaration of Independence'. The point of the article was that the comic book field was upside down — that it was an inverted pyramid. The company is wrongly perceived as the most important element in a comic book's success or failure. Hence, Marvel is bad and DC is good (although, at that time, the perception was that Marvel was good and DC was bad). The next most important *perceived* layer of the pyramid is the characters. Spider-man is good. Superman is bad. X-men is good. Jonah Hex is bad. What this perception fails to take into account is that Superman is good when the creators doing Superman are good. Superman is bad when the creators doing Superman are bad. And that brings us to the inverted apex buried in the sand, wherein reside the interchangeable work-made-for hired hands.

The historical evidence is there if you will only open your eyes to see it. Creators are *not* interchangeable. A Barry Windsor-Smith or a John Byrne or a Todd McFarlane can *not* be replaced by just anyone who knows that human beings have two eyes, one on either side of their nose. The fans, your customers, decide who is a good creator and who is a bad creator. They vote with their wallets.

Speculators, who *used* to be your customers, have gone away. What are left are fans and readers who want to get ten dollars worth of entertainment for ten dollars. Most of the comic books that you stock are not entertaining. They aren't well-drawn and they aren't well-written. Why is that? The answer is that while you are buying comic books that you hope will interest your customers, the mainstream publishers are simply trying to maintain or increase their share of the market. And they want to maintain or increase their share of the market at the expense of all other publishers. This doesn't work, as we have seen in the last six months, but, being basic business entities, it is all a mainstream publisher can do. It is immaterial to Marvel or DC or Dark Horse if you sell the twenty copies of a title that you order. If you order twenty copies of a mini-series and you have placed your final orders before the first issue arrives in your store, the company gets paid for every copy ordered. If, smelling a rat, you cut your orders for the next mini-series to five copies, then the mainstream company will solicit for *four* mini-series instead of one, or three mini-series with a larger cover price. Every time you cut your orders, they increase their output to make up for the lost revenue.

The comic book junk bond market collapsed in 1993. It is dead. You could no more make money, now, by speculating on comic books than you could by buying every lottery ticket in New South Wales. As I said at the Diamond Seminar in 1992, there is nothing wrong with junk bonds. A lot of people made a fortune on junk bonds; but, they were the ones who knew when to get out of the market. Today, in the first part of 1994, as you regard the storage rooms of your stores filled with less-than-worthless junk bonds, the majority of you are doing the most dangerous thing you can do in a dead junk bond market. You are eagerly scanning your distributors' catalogues for the next hot junk bond.

You are afraid of missing out on something that is hot. Afraid of under-ordering on one hot title, you over-order on a hundred of them. If you order four

copies of a DC title and sell one of them, you have lost money.

Returnable junk bonds are not the answer. If you pay fifty dollars cash for junk bonds, sell ten dollars worth of junk bonds and return forty dollars worth of junk bonds for credit, you have *still* traded fifty dollars cash for ten dollars cash. And if you use your forty dollars worth of credit to buy forty dollars worth of junk bonds and sell another five dollars worth of junk bonds, you have traded fifty dollars cash for ten dollars cash after thirty days, and another five dollars cash after sixty days. That is a one-way ticket to disaster.

Please be aware that from the top of their bureaucracies to the bottom, the mainstream companies are in the business of fooling you. If they have talked you into buying twenty more copies of a book than you otherwise would have, then they have accomplished their task. It means nothing to them if you sell those extra twenty copies in two months, six months, five years or never. It means nothing to them if you sell them for cover price, at a substantial loss or for five cents.

I was given a choice between speaking to you generally about the direct market or as the publisher of *Cerebus*. *Cerebus* is doing fine, thanks. I would no more stand up here and *sell* you on buying *Cerebus* than Neil Gaiman would stand up here and *sell* you on buying *Sandman*.

What I *am* here to do is to advise you to start choosing a store identity. The only store identity we have had to date has been 'We Carry Everything'. This was difficult five years ago; it was impossible two years ago. Today, it is a self-destructive and self-deceptive lunacy. If you order even five or three or two copies of *every* mainstream title you are giving the mainstream companies a license to pick your pocket.

It is much later than you think. If I were a store owner, I would have great faith in *Sandman*, *Shade* and *Hellblazer*. But I sure wouldn't buy twenty-five copies of every Vertigo title that comes out. I would have great faith in *Spawn*, but I wouldn't buy a hundred copies of every Image title. I would have great faith in Peter David's *Incredible Hulk* but I wouldn't buy every Marvel Comic. Nor would I buy every DC comic, every Malibu comic, every Dark Horse comic. I would buy the ones I have faith in; I would buy the ones that I thought looked interesting. I would watch for creators like Neil Gaiman, Todd McFarlane, Peter David who improve, who are productive and who are creators I would feel I could base my business upon.

It is *much* later than you think. The store owners who only ordered what was 'hot', who sat behind their counter counting their money are out of business or are on their way out of business. 'I just order what my customers want' was a fine theory a few years ago, but in 1994 your customers don't *know* what they want. More choices is not the answer to that problem. If a customer can't find something that interests him out of twenty new choices every week, offering him forty choices is only going to make it worse, not better.

Retailers, whether they like it or not, are the leaders in the direct market. Each store is its own comic book universe. It is *your* choice and no one else's whether you have a floor display of the *Complete R. Crumb* from Fantagraphics or a buckled-up back issue of *Zap* stuffed in behind your *Marvel Masterworks Collections*. Whether you have three copies of each of the *Cerebus* phone books on display next to your cash register or a dust-covered copy of *High Society* mixed in with your *Death of Superman* trades is up to you. Going by market share, thirty-five percent of your store should be devoted to Marvel, twenty percent to DC, eight percent to Image, seven percent for Dark Horse, five percent for Valiant and four percent for everything else.

Is *that* what you want your store to say? Is *that* the emphasis that best reflects your view of the entirety of the comic book medium? Do you really think that in your store, in your comic book universe, Peter Bagge, Chester Brown, Joe Matt, Rick Veitch, Mark Schultz, Donna Barr, Wendy Pini, Evan Dorkin, Alan Moore, Eddie Campbell, art spiegelman, Will Eisner, Vaughn Bode, Carl Barks, Harvey Kurtzman, Jeff Smith, Robert Crumb, Jim Woodring, Dan Clowes, Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez, Dave McKean, Scott McCloud, Michael Allred, Reed Waller, Kate Worley, Colleen Doran, Teri Wood, Larry Marder, Martin Wagner and dozens of others should be crushed together on a little asteroid out by Pluto, crammed into four percent of your available display space?

You see, I list those names and in those names I see the core of a comic book store, a comic book universe. With a line-up like that I would feel very confident advertising in college newspapers, posting flyers around my neighbourhood in coffee houses and pubs, promoting comic books to people who haven't read one since they were in their teens.

Let me put it another way.

The Image guys split off from Marvel two years ago. In that time have you seen one hot creator on any Marvel title? Steve Platt was one, the guy who did the last few issues of *Moon Knight*. Rob Liefield made him an offer and now he's doing work for Extreme Studios. *Two years* for one hot creator to show up and they get a grand total of three issues out of him.

You see, Image Comics, whether you love those six guys or hate them is the first 'right-side up' pyramid in mainstream comics. Todd McFarlane comes first, then *Spawn* and Image? Image is a pile of paper filed in L.A. County and a little 'i' logo. Your best business instincts recognize this. You snarl and grumble and grind your teeth about Image's late books, but *your* orders, collectively, made the *Pitt* #3 — now more than a year late — the number five best-selling title for April. And that's on a resolicitation.

Whether you want to face it or not, 1994 is the Year of Decision. Decision '94. The mainstream publishers have *decided* to bury you in another avalanche of choices. If you *decide* to carry on with

business-as-usual, ordering everything — but fewer individual copies — returning what is returnable, endlessly, fruitlessly searching for next hot mainstream title, I think all you will do is double your junk bond inventory and deplete your remaining cash reserves. And the mainstream companies, fat with cash, fat with *your* cash will have another record sales year.

My best advice to you is to devote most of your time and energy and display space to creators who own what they do. Ultimately, an inverted pyramid is just a junk bond printing press. Nothing more and nothing less.

Decision '94 requires leadership on the part of retailers. It would have been easier two years ago when the field was fat with cash to move your resources from company-controlled comic books in the direction of creator-controlled comic books. I think that retailers who own chains of stores are unable to lead. Their need for massive revenues to maintain the status quo neutralises their effectiveness. I think that stores which expand too quickly, always seeking larger premises to stuff full of junk bonds are unable to lead for the same reason. They are the acolytes, they are the adherents and they are the high priests of the inverted pyramid. Their attachment to the mainstream is a sentimental one. They continue to order books based on what those books meant to them ten years ago, twenty years ago. They look at each new issue as it comes in, but they don't *see* it. As we enter an age where the difference between sincerely-intended, heartfelt creativity and the last wretched excesses of the corporate shell game become excruciatingly apparent, we need retailers who are willing to be different and who are willing to make their stores different, retailers who examine each new choice offered to them *not* on the basis of 'how many of these do I think I can sell?', but rather 'do I want these in my store?'

It is a sad truth about comics retailing, at this moment, that you all tend to over-order the same things, you all tend to order just enough of the same things and you all tend to under-order the same things. I think there are books in each category which belong in the other two. I think there are books in each category that you can eliminate entirely from your shelves in the interest of establishing a store identity. Many of you would be better off not ordering *Cerebus* if it conflicts who the ideal of the kind of store you would like to have.

You have to *believe* in what is in your store. You have to *believe* that what you carry is worth buying. If you *lose* that faith, if even so much as ten per cent of your store is taken up with material that you can't take pride in — not material that you necessarily like personally, but material that you are proud to sell — then I think that you are a rudderless ship, desperately trying to anticipate the changing tastes of a customer base for whom you have no respect, with whom you have nothing in common, and who represent to you nothing but the money in their wallets. And if that is the case, then I think you have failed the spirit of comic books, yourselves and your customers in an identical fashion to the mainstream publishers, the way *they* have failed the spirit of comics, themselves and you by having no respect for you, by feeling nothing in common with you and by seeing you only as a pile of currency to be appropriated.

I don't think you want to be like that.

I don't think you want to be like the mainstream companies, cynically offering second-rate retreads of half-baked notions as if they were genuine expressions of the spirit which informs the work of Will Eisner and art spiegelman, Harvey Kurtzman and Robert Crumb, Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman.

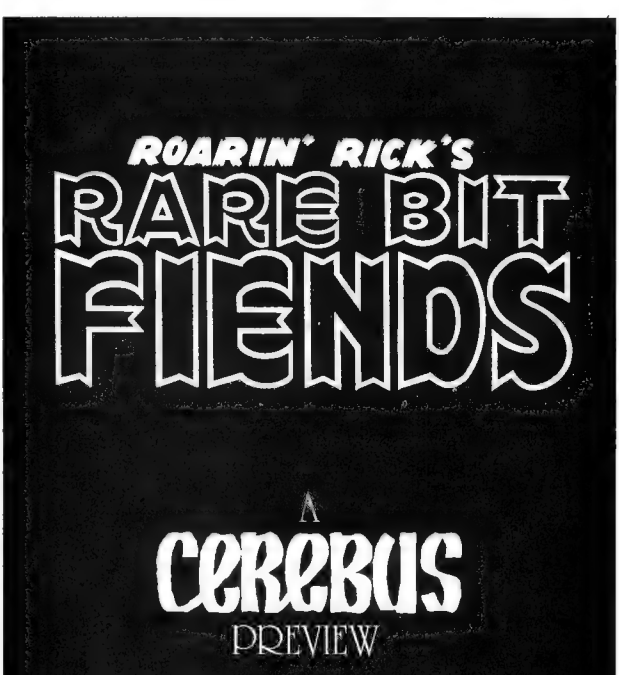
If you derive pleasure from that; if you are so bloated with avarice and so bereft of humanity that *A Contract with God* is the same to you as the wedding of Jean Gray and Scott Summers, so undiscerning that *maus* is the same to you as the new grim and gritty Green Lantern, then I have nothing to say to you. If your desire for currency, your lust for cash has so debased your view of this singular and most magical medium, then I pity you, as I do Ron Perlman, Ted Turner and everyone else with a dollar sign for a soul who is in a position to do good and who, instead, perversely can only represent what, to me, is the ultimate evil — allowing, condoning and encouraging the wholesale destruction of all that is good, sincerely-intended, heartfelt and important to make way for the calculated, the cynical, the corrupt and the second, third and fourth rate.

Now more than ever, you must lead. Now, more than ever, the fate of the comic book medium rests with you. Now, more than ever, you must make choices. And you must make choices as if the fate and work of Peter Bagge, Chester Brown, Joe Matt, Rick Veitch, Mark Schultz, Donna Barr, Wendy Pini, Evan Dorkin, Alan Moore, Eddie Campbell, art spiegelman, Will Eisner, Vaughn Bode, Carl Barks, Harvey Kurtzman, Jeff Smith, Robert Crumb, Jim Woodring, Dan Clowes, Gilbert and Jaime Hernandez, Dave McKean, Scott McCloud, Michael Allred, Reed Waller, Kate Worley, Colleen Doran, Teri Wood, Larry Marder, Martin Wagner and all the others rests with you and you alone.

Because now, more than ever.

It does.

Thank you.



Roarin' Rick marches right along. Waiting for me when I got back to Canada from OZCON III (thanks to George and Christine, everyone at *King's Comics* and the legions of small pressers and self-publishers who are turning things right-side-up Down Under) was another fifteen pages of RARE BIT faxes. There is something really compelling about these pages. I've talked to several people who were recipients of Rick's Christmas RARE BIT ashcan who have had the same experience that I have; they just keep going back and re-reading it over and over. The last time I talked to Rick, I INTENDED to ask him about single copy prices and subscriptions, but we ended up talking about his dream (slated for an up-coming issue) wherein Gerhard and I are hiding bodies under the floorboards out in his garage, only it turns out that it isn't Rick's garage, it's Gerhard's garage and Gerhard's mother comes running up and . . . well, hey, wouldn't that make *you* forget to ask about single copy rates and subscriptions?

Next time, I promise I'll have the information. For now, the Roarin' One (or the Veitch Monster, as I like to call him) can be reached at KING HELL PRESS, P.O. Box 1731, West Townshend, Vermont, 05359.

Step right up for more RARE BITS, fiends.

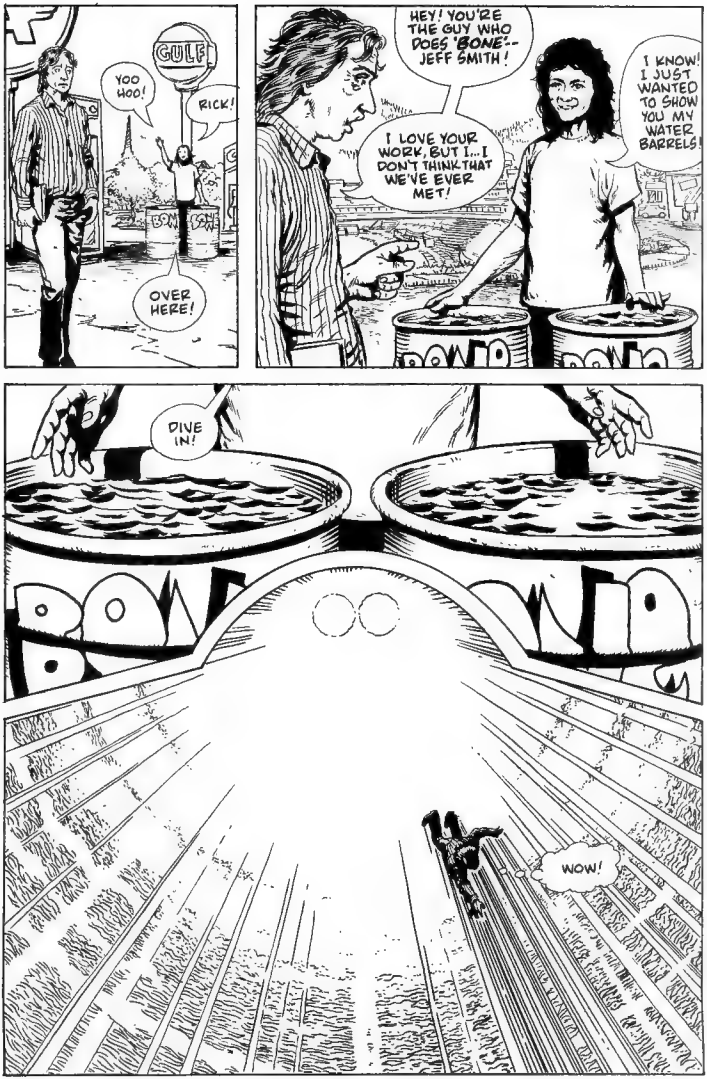
YUP. SHE'S A BEAUT. BEEN PULLIN' THIS LINE SINCE THE DAWN OF THE STEAM AGE!
AND BEFORE THAT?
RAPE BUTT FIENDS
IF PEOPLE ONLY KNEW, SON...
HOW DO YOU KEEP HER RUNNING SO SMOOTHLY?
YA' GOTTA TAKE HER TEMPERATURE BY STEPPIN' INTO THE STEAM HERE, LIKE THIS...
THEN YA' LISTEN!
AFTER YOU BEEN WORKIN' AROUND HER LONG ENOUGH, YOU LEARN TO HEAR EVERY LITTLE SYSTEM HUMMING ALONG INSIDE HER!
HEAR IT?

I CAN'T TELL IF THIS WAS THE STOP WHERE I LEFT MY JEEP PARKED...
THESE TRAIN STATIONS ALL LOOK ALIKE!
I THINK THIS IS IT!
STRIPPED! B-BUT MY JEEP'S NOT WHITE..
WATCH YOURSELF! THERE'S A BREAKOUT!
IT'S BLACK!
...AND I'VE GOT ALL THIS MONEY WITH ME!!
I BETTER GET WALKING!

ROBERTSON PAPER CO.
ESTABLISHED 1912
THE MILL.
I HAVEN'T DREAMT ABOUT THIS PLACE IN YEARS!
MY OLD MAN CLIMBED THESE STAIRS EVERY DAY. HE PISSED AWAY THIRTY-FIVE YEARS IN THIS SHIT-HOLE!
GOD-- THE SMELL OF THE PLACE-- IT'S SO SAD!
SNIFF SNF
DAD!? YOU DON'T HAVE TO TOADY UP TO YOUR BOSSES ANYMORE!!
YOU'RE ON YOUR DEATHBED!
I'VE GOT TO PROTECT MYSELF, RICKY! KISS KISS
THOSE OTHER GUYS ARE JUST WAITING TO STEAL MY JOB! THAT'S WHAT LIFE'S ALL ABOUT!
B-BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE! SOB: THINGS WORKED OUT FOR ME! BLUB: L-LOOK-- I'M A SUCCESSFUL ARTIST-- JUST LIKE YOU ALWAYS WANTED TO BE! A-A-A-AAND I GAVE YOU TWO BEAUTIFUL GRANDCHILREN...
WELL, IF ANYONE ASKS IF I LEFT YOU THE COLOR GREEN-- SAY NO!
AWW, DAD!

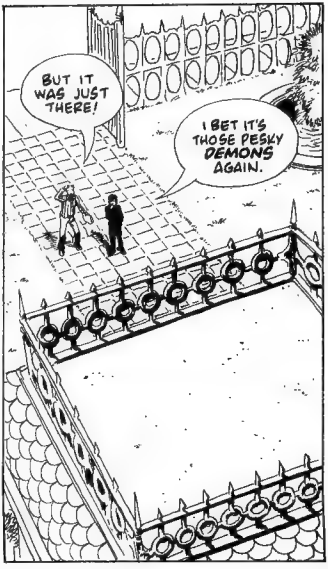
THE LAUNDRY IS REALLY STARTING TO PILE UP!
I'D BETTER TAKE IT OVER TO MADONNA'S BEFORE THE WEDDING STARTS!
AIN'T SEEN HER IN OVER A WEEK!
IF SHE DON'T SHOW UP SOON WE'LL HAVE TO POSTPONE THE CEREMONY!
THIS WILL BE THE THIRD TIME!
YOU'RE GOING TO BE DOING 'SANDMAN'.
HUH?
LATER...
THEY MONITOR AND BROADCAST ON THE EXTREMELY LOW EARTH FREQUENCIES THAT SHAPE PEOPLE'S DREAMS.
BEAUTIFUL.
WE CALL IT AN 'EARTH ANTENNA'!
THEY WERE SECRETLY BUILT ALL ALONG THE INTERSTATE HIGHWAY SYSTEM IN THE FIFTIES!
BUT WHY SHOW ME THIS NOW?
THE PRESIDENT WANTED YOU TO KNOW, RICK!

WHEW! THE OCEAN WAS REALLY ROUGH! WE ALMOST DIDN'T MAKE IT BACK, VEITCH!
TELL ME ABOUT IT, BISSETTE! WE BETTER NOT SWIM THAT FAR OUT AGAIN!
I'LL GET THE COMPUTER TO FIND OUR LONG UNDER-WEAR!
IT'S AMAZING HOW IT CAN SORT SO MANY SETS!
OH NO-- THEY'RE ALL BURNED!
WE'RE DUE UP ON THE STREET IN FIVE MINUTES! WE'LL HAVE TO WEAR THEM!
SO THIS IS OUR NEXT PROJECT!?
YEH. THEY GOT IT RUNNING BY REMOTE CONTROL!
PEOPLE SEEM TO LIKE IT...


GULF
YOO HOO!
RICK!
OVER HERE!
HEY! YOU'RE THE GUY WHO DOES 'BONE'-- JEFF SMITH!
I LOVE YOUR WORK, BUT I... I DON'T THINK THAT WE'VE EVER MET!
I KNOW! I JUST WANTED TO SHOW YOU MY WATER BARRELS!
DIVE IN!
WOW!

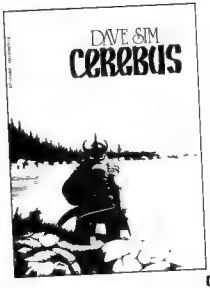
ISN'T THAT NEIL GAIMAN'S HOUSE?
YEH... BUT SOMETHING SEEMS STRANGE AND OUT OF PLACE...
WRITERS CONFERENCE
LOOK! ON THE ROOF-- A ROWBOAT!
HOW COULD SUCH A THING GET WAY UP THERE?
I DUNNO-- BUT I'D BETTER LET HIM KNOW... RIGHT NOW!

HI. IT'S ME.
NEIL! THERE'S A BOAT ON THE BELFRY OF YOUR HOUSE!!
I'M NOT KIDDING! COME AND LOOK!


BUT IT WAS JUST THERE!
I BET IT'S THOSE PESKY DEMONS AGAIN.

COLONEL... I'M SURE YOU'RE AWARE THAT THIS PEARL HARBOR BUSINESS CHANGES EVERYTHING HERE AT THE PROJECT.
THE STAFF WILL REDOUBLE ITS EFFORTS, GENERAL.
GOOD. UNFORTUNATELY A COLUMNIST IN CHICAGO HAS CAUGHT WIND OF US. SHE'S IN DANGER OF JEOPARDIZING ALL WE'VE ACCOMPLISHED.
WHY DON'T I CALL HER PERSONALLY, SIR? PERHAPS I CAN APPEAL TO HER PATRIOTISM?
MISS LANDERS? THIS IS COLONEL VEITCH WITH ARMY INTELLIGENCE.
I'M CALLING ABOUT A HIGHLY SECRET WEAPONS SYSTEM YOU MIGHT HAVE RECEIVED KNOWLEGE OF...
IT'S TOO LATE, YOU FOOL!
TOO LATE!

CEREBUS: THE FIRST HALF

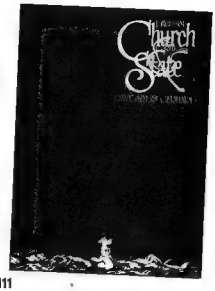


CEREBUS reprints Cerebus 1 to 25
500 pages $25

The Cerebus volume introduces the cast of characters including Elrod the Albino, Red Sophia, Jaka, the Cockroach (later Captain Cockroach with Elrod as Bunky the Albino), Lord Julius, President Weisshaupt and many more.

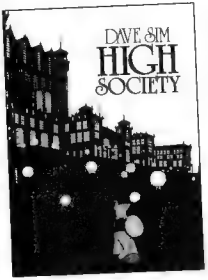
HIGH SOCIETY reprints Cerebus 26 to 50
500 pages $25

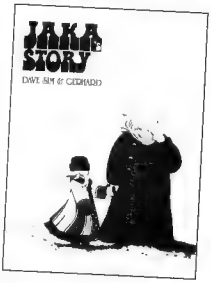
Cerebus gets swept up into the world of high power politics in Iest and runs for Prime Minister. Introduces Astoria, Filgate, Blakely, the Regency Elf, Dirty Fleagle and his brother Dirty Drew McGrew, Duke Leonardi The Roach becomes Moon Roach and Sergeant Preston of the Royal Mounted Iestan police



CHURCH & STATE Vol. I & II reprints Cerebus 52 to 111
1200 pages $30 ea.

One of the longest single stories in the history of comics Manipulated by President Weisshaupt, Cerebus finds himself married and then finds himself as Pope of the Eastern Church! Introduces Mrs. Henrot-Gutch (Cerebus' mother-in-law), Boobah, Bear, Bishop Powers, Bishop Posey, Mick and Keef and many more. The Roach becomes Wolveroach and the Secret Sacred Wars Roach. Also, in volume II, is the Flaming Carrot cross-over



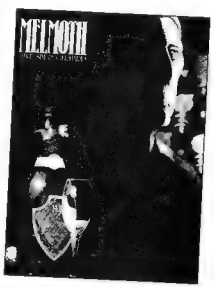


JAKA'S STORY reprints Cerebus 114 to 136
500 pages $25

Cerebus returns to find his life in ruins and ends up as a houseguest of the love of his life, Jaka, and her new husband Rick. Introduces Oscar the poet, Pud, the tavern-owner, and Mrs. Thatcher.

MELMOTH reprints Cerebus 139 to 150
250 pages $17

Cerebus, mistakenly believing that Jaka is dead, takes up residence in Dino's Cafe, clutching Jaka's childhood doll, Missy and his sword The other half of the story is a faithful retelling of the last days of Oscar Wilde The Roach becomes normalroach. Introduces Doris, Dino, Janice, Robbie and Reggie Cameo appearances by Mick and Keef.



and

CEREBUS NUMBER ZERO
(reprinting the 'in-between' stories from Cerebus 51, 112/113 and 137-138) ($2.25)

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P.O. Box 1674, Station C,
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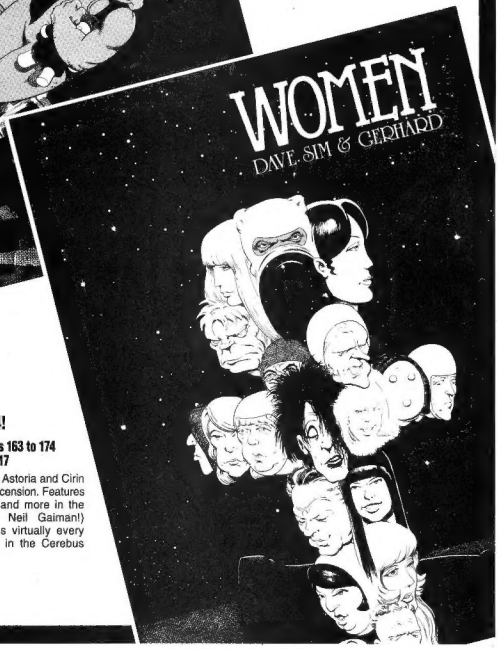
Please include your name, address, daytime phone number, Visa or Mastercard number & expiration date and name on the card

THE SECOND HALF BEGINS HERE

FLIGHT reprints Cerebus 151 to 162
250 pages $17

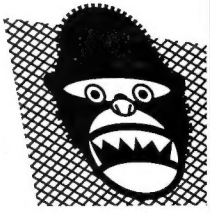
Cerebus explodes into action in the second half of the 300 issue story-line. Trapped in lest, hunted by the Ciriniists, Cerebus battles back. Featuring Punisherroach as well as the unexpected reappearance of many early Cerebus characters, including the first (visual) appearance of Suenteus Po!



NEW IN '94!

WOMEN reprints Cerebus 163 to 174
250 pages $17

The second half continues as Astoria and Cirin contend for the fabled Final Ascension. Features Swoon, Snuff, Sleaze, Sulk and more in the highly-acclaimed (even by Neil Gaiman!) Sandman parody, as well as virtually every female character introduced in the Cerebus storyline to date.



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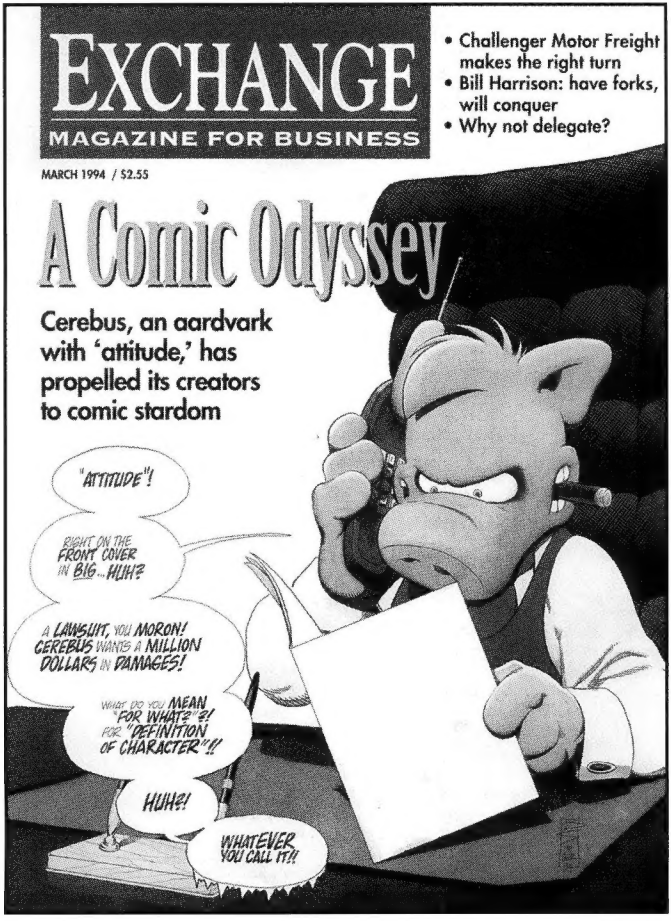
EXCHANGE
MAGAZINE FOR BUSINESS
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• Bill Harrison: have forks, will conquer
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A Comic Odyssey
Cerebus, an aardvark with 'attitude,' has propelled its creators to comic stardom
"ATTITUDE"!
RIGHT ON THE FRONT COVER IN BIG...HUH?
A LAWSUIT, YOU MORON! CEREBUS WANTS A MILLION DOLLARS IN DAMAGES!
WHAT DO YOU MEAN "FOR WHAT?" "FOR "DEFINITION OF CHARACTER"?!
HUH?!
WHATEVER YOU CALL IT!!

EXCHANGE magazine for March (for all of you Aardvarkian completists out there) is available while supplies last for $6 dollars a copy which includes postage. Make cheque or money order payable to **EXCHANGE, 215 Fairway Road, Kitchener, Ontario N2G 4E5.**

(quantity orders contact Becky Carter at 519-894-1630)

Roarin' Rick Veitch -- probably the most overworked cartoonist in the history of his field. At the height of his career he found a way to squeeze even more comics out.

He's Looking for People Who Like to Doze

TODAY HUNDREDS of overworked men and women who never thought they could find more time in their busy schedules are working four, six, even up to eight extra hours a day and sometimes even getting paid for it. They can all thank Roarin' Rick Veitch, the desperately overburdened artist who discovered a way to increase his deadline production by 30%!

Since he often fell asleep at the drawing board anyway, Roarin' Rick reasoned that if he could keep his hands working while his mind slept, he could augment his output tremendously. As it went, he was often in a stupor, even when awake! So, Roarin' Rick created a series of self-hypnotic phrases which he repeated over and over as he bashed-out a 64-pager and nodded off.

RARE BIT FIENDS

When Roarin' Rick awoke, he was astonished to find a complete comic page waiting for him, one he had no conscious recollection of working on! Stranger still, these auto-illustrated artifacts seemed to accurately depict his most secret and personal dreams! With a nod to the revered Winsor McCay, Rick called these mysterious subliminal comics his 'RARE BIT FIENDS' and went on to produce hundreds of them, marveling at their strangely fascinating storylines and the intriguingly symbolic roles his friends and co-workers acted out in them.

SOME OF THE PEOPLE ROARIN' RICK HAS DREAMT ABOUT

Sturdy Steve Bissette: Author/Artist/Self-Publisher of 'TYRANT' and perennial Sixty-Three wage slave, who shares Sweatshop Studio space and atmosphere with Roarin' Rick. "Now I know how the sumbitch really feels about my various personality disorders!"

Dave Sim: Author/Artist/Self-Publisher of 'CEREBUS' and fellow workaholic. "They're telling you to self-publish, stupid."

Affable Al Moore: Heartless boss and 39-year old adolescent. "I don't care if you ARE asleep -- if you're drawing comics, they better be OUR comics!"

Jaunty John Totleben: Collaborator on upcoming 'HELLHEAD' and Sweatshop Stablemate. "Heh -- you should see MY dreams sometime!"

Neil Gaiman: Author of the OTHER comic book about dreams. "I like the part where I'm Uncle Fester. I mean...it was lovely."

Cindy Veitch: Fellow dreamer and long-suffering spouse. "Alright -- who are these BIMBOS you've beeen dreaming about?"

A PLAN TO DO MORE 'RARE BIT FIENDS'

Under threat of impending litigation from his friends and co-workers after they saw themselves in 'RARE BIT FIENDS', Roarin' Rick said: "Bzzsnork...snk. Huh? Oh...yeah. I bet there are people all over the world who might like to read something really weird like this. Why not give these readers the benefit of my years chained to the drawing board -- including all the unconscious complexes I've developed over my career?" Roarin' Rick envisioned a new kind of 'RARE BIT FIENDS', more lavishly executed than his first sketchbook prototypes, distributed to the masses, offering readers a direct link to the most primitive reptilian levels of his mind!

Roarin' Rick's employer was appalled. He couldn't believe the Roarin' One had taken time from his overburdened deadline schedule to work on such foofrah. But when he saw his artist;'s productivity rise from eleven to twelve books a month, even he had to agree. Roarin' Rick had developed a way to spend even more time at the drawing board. Affable Al tried many methods, including hypnotism, drug therapy and electro-shock stimulation, to direct Roarin' Rick's newfound output away from 'RARE BIT FIENDS' and into more Sizzling Sixty-Three Spectaculars, to no avail.

After the Roarin' One's nervous collapse, his psychoanalyst was not surprised that the patient's unconscious mind resisted such attempts to control it, citing studies done on the dreams of concentration camp inmates during the court hearings. And now, armed with a judge's order giving him the right to dream whatever he wants, Roarin' Rick is back at the board, fast asleep, cranking out new and exciting pages of 'RARE BIT FIENDS'. Look for it in 1994 from KING HELL PRESS!

FAMOUS ARTISTS ROARIN' RICK DREAMS ABOUT

Marilyn Monroe
Roy Lichtenstein
I.M. Pei
Brigitte Bardot
Boody Rogers
Don Van Vliet
Sophia Loren
Bob Dylan
Toulouse-Lautrec

ROARIN' RICK'S
RARE BIT FIENDS
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